



February 24, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, we express our firm support for Senate Bill 571.

Individuals sentenced to a crime may forfeit many rights, but the right to have a voice in our political process cannot be one of them.

It is estimated that 5.2 million Americans remain disenfranchised as a result of felony convictions -- which is more than the entire population of Oregon. Three quarters of these individuals are living in their communities, having fully completed their sentence or are under supervision on parole.¹

Of this total approximately 1.2 million women are disenfranchised. That is more than the population of Montana, or of Delaware and Vermont combined.

Systemic racism has plagued and continues to plague the criminal justice system and, whether conscious or not, we cannot countenance using voting restrictions as another arm to sustain and enforce it. Research has shown that the United States effectively operates two distinct criminal justice systems - one for people of privilege and the other for poor people and people of color.² This disparity begins well before arrest and conviction.

African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to experience lengthy prison sentences. African American adults are 5.9 times as likely to be incarcerated than whites.

Many acknowledge that America has a dismal and painful history of racial discrimination, but a more accurate and salient statement is that America continues to have a dismal and painful history of racial discrimination. This legislation is long overdue.

Respectfully,

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¹ Locked Out 2020: Estimates of People Denied Rights due to a Felony Conviction, The Sentencing Project, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/locked-out-2020-estimates-of-people-denied-voting-rights-due-to-a-felony-conviction/> - III. Disenfranchisement in 2020

² Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System,, The Sentencing Project, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>